

References and Resources continued.

The program features many types of families and different cultures. For more information on the program, contact FamilyWorks, Inc., 20 East Circle Drive, Suite 190, Athens, Ohio 45701-3751, or call (740) 593-9505.

*Before It's Too Late: Why Some Kids Get Into Trouble- and What Parents Can Do About It.* By Stanton Samenow. Times Books (1999). With the encouraging message that kids' behavioral problems can be corrected with proper intervention, this book offers useful insight into children's personalities, providing practical suggestions for changing bad behaviors and averting problems. The author discusses ways to recognize potential problems early, identifying common traits of antisocial children. It also teaches coping skills and introduces ways to help kids accept responsibility for their actions.

*Surviving Your Adolescents: How To Manage And Let Go Of Your 13-18 Year Olds.* By Thomas Phelan. Child Management (1998). This book, with an encouraging and positive tone, provides a concrete, step by step approach for parents going through difficult times with teenagers. Included are guidelines for evaluating the seriousness of problems, deciding when to seek professional intervention, and how to improve relationships while maintaining a positive outlook. ■

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*Marriage and family therapists are mental health professionals who treat a wide array of disorders, working with individuals, couples, and families. Marriage and family therapy clients report that they are highly satisfied with the services they have received, and research shows that marriage and family therapy is a cost-effective, short-term, and results-oriented form of treatment.*

*The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), the professional organization representing marriage and family therapists, believes that therapists with specific and rigorous training in marriage and family therapy provide the most effective mental health care to individuals, couples, and families.*



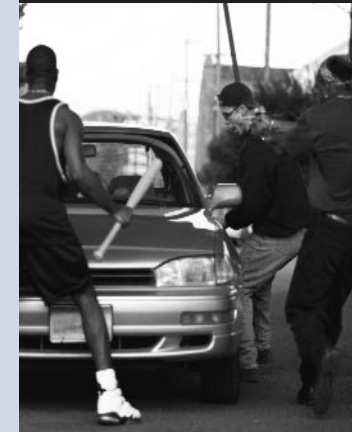
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## Adolescent Behavior Problems



Many adolescents today have problems and are getting into trouble. After all, there are a lot of pressures for kids to deal with among friends and family. For some youth, pressures include poverty, violence, parental problems, and

gangs. Kids may also be concerned about significant issues such as religion, gender roles, values, or ethnicity. Some children are having difficulty dealing with past traumas they have experienced, like abuse. Parents and their teenagers are struggling between the youth's wanting independence while still needing parental guidance. Sometimes all these conflicts result in behavior problems.

Any number of isolated behavior problems can represent adolescent problems and delinquency—shoplifting, truancy, a fight in school, drug or alcohol ingestion. Sometimes, kids can't easily explain why they act the way they do. They may be just as confused about it as the adults, or they simply see delinquent behaviors as appropriate ways to deal with what they experience. Parents and loved ones may feel scared, angry, frustrated, or hopeless. They may feel guilty and wonder where they went wrong. All these feelings are normal, but it is important to understand that there is help available to troubled kids and their families.

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## How do you know when to seek help?

What are the signs of trouble? Many adolescents get into trouble sometimes. A big question for parents (whether they be "traditional," single, step, or grandparents), though, is how to know when a youth is headed for more serious problems, or when bad behavior is just "a kid being a kid." Try to focus on patterns rather than an isolated event. In other words, does the behavior happen repeatedly despite efforts to change it?

The patterns signaling the need for help include not only deviant behaviors by the adolescent, but also the presence of other problems in the family or tensions at home. For example, problems in the parents' marriage or frequent fighting or hostility among the family members can also be involved in the youth's behavior problems. The problem behaviors and other family issues can interact and feed off each other, so that it is hard to tell where it started.

Of course, there are also some obvious signs that indicate the need for immediate and effective intervention, including violence against other persons or animals, or when peers are involved in destructive processes (crime, truancy, drugs). Or, a parent may simply have an instinctive feeling that something serious is happening. An important first step to find out what is going on is to try to talk to the adolescent and other family members about what is happening, possible reasons, and potential solutions. Others who know the adolescent and family, like teachers or caregivers, may also be able to provide information about the youth's mood or behaviors outside of the home to help assess the severity of the problem.

Many factors put youth and families at *risk* for juvenile delinquency, though they do not necessarily *cause* delinquency. Such factors include youth attention



and hyperactivity problems and learning disorders, volatile temperament, and even the early onset of puberty and sexual development. All these factors affect the way an adolescent feels and acts and also how peers, family, and society view the adolescent.

Similarly, parental problems, such as depression, substance abuse, and domestic violence can interact negatively with a youth's developing path of delinquency. Rather than causing delinquency, factors such as these tend to place youth at increased risk, intensify the downward spiral, and in turn add to the difficulty in changing these processes for the better. ■

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## What kinds of treatments will work?

Once you have determined that you and your loved ones need help, there are many kinds of treatment that you should explore. First, there are popular group-based, residential, and "life-experiential" options, like survival camps, boot camps, and "scared straight" programs, which have had some limited success. Research indicates that the most effective treatments, even with very difficult youth, are programs and treatments that are family-based and multisystemic. That means treatment that involves the adolescent and his or her family, and that also addresses other aspects of their lives, such as the school system, the neighborhood, peers, juvenile justice system, and even employers. In other words, it is treatment that focuses on all the parts of the youth's life that shape how he or she views the world, emphasizing family and parental support.

Treatments that focus on the family can also be useful in helping adults develop their parenting skills, deal with stress, and work on marital relationships. Many parent aids have demonstrated promising positive results. Professionals, such as family therapists, are there to help the adolescent and family gain understanding of the relationship dynamics and background issues that may be influencing the problem, and come up with solutions.

The next section provides more ideas on how to start finding help for adolescent problems. ■

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## References and Resources

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. See the back of this brochure.

*Parenting Teenagers: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting of Teens.* By Don Dinkmeyer Jr., Gary McKay, Joyce McKay, and Don Dinkmeyer, Sr. Times Books (1998). This book explores the parenting of adolescents through the Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) program. It includes practical information to help encourage mutual respect, cooperation, responsibility, and self-reliance in teenagers. The authors discuss how parents can take care of themselves in times of stress, include real-life examples, and address married and single parents and stepparents.

*Parenting Wisely.* By FamilyWorks, Inc. This interactive multimedia program, which parents can use at home on a multimedia computer, is based on parenting research and helps parents improve their parenting skills. It addresses three main areas: how to communicate better using active listening and "I" messages; assertive discipline, including contracting, praise, and setting consequences; and supervision, or working with teachers, and monitoring homework and friends.